

## TESTIMONY ON HB 5429 AN ACT CONCERNING TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

via email to pdtestimony@cga.ct.gov

March 14, 2022

Dear Chairman Cassano, Chairwoman McCarthy Vahey, Vice Chairman Needleman, Vice Chairwoman Goupil, Ranking Member Senator Hwang, Ranking Member Zullo, and Distinguished Members of the Connecticut General Assembly Joint Planning and Development Committee:

Testimony in support of HB 5429

Let me begin by thanking you for passing HB 6107 last year. Truly terrific! Now we have a new opportunity, so I write in support of the provisions of HB 5429 that will enable Connecticut to address the chronic lag in housing construction. We must do better to meet the needs of people who want to live and work in our state. This law is a great opportunity to maximize the benefits of Amtrak and CTfastrack by permitting a mix of housing types that will be allowed “as-of-right” near transit stations. The inclusion of a minimum of 10% affordable housing by deed restriction and inclusion of reduced parking requirements, will spur development around existing transit assets.

As the board chair for Preservation Connecticut, my commitment is to its mission to preserve, protect, and promote the buildings, sites, and landscapes that contribute to the heritage and vitality of Connecticut communities. As a historian, I understand that preserving the past is an investment in our future. The potential of HB 5429 is that it nods to a community’s history by investment that enables each town to look again at its distinctive historic places.

These places are well suited for new futures when there is a commitment to retaining them. Historically, transit systems were sited near residential, commercial, and manufacturing centers to serve transportation needs of an earlier era. Now it is apparent that many of these locations are still relevant and surviving structures are ideal for adaptive reuse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

By zoning to allow moderate density as-of-right within a half mile of a town’s transit station, many more of Connecticut’s historic buildings will be able to return to the use for which they were built: housing. What’s more, under the bill, towns remain empowered to provide architectural standards for the scale, form, and materials of these projects. Towns can also identify how the fifteen homes per acre can be distributed.

Or towns can think big and benefit from programs such as historic tax credits and low-income housing tax credits to achieve their goals. Preservation Connecticut celebrates the Montgomery Mills rehabilitation project in Windsor Locks. This converted a mill building near the train station is an excellent example of the type of housing project enabled when flexible zoning is as-of-right. The legislature is encouraged to continue to pursue policies encouraging the re-use of these buildings.

Preservation is shown to be an economic driver in Connecticut. Rehabilitating existing buildings near transit stations with a mix that includes living units will bring local economic benefits directly, through spending on construction and, going forward, through expanding the tax base. For every \$100 spent on the rehabilitation of an historic structure, \$83 goes directly to a Connecticut worker (read: taxpayer).

As a preservationist, I am excited by the possibilities that HB 5429 offers. The protection of historic sites while encouraging adaptive reuse and complementary new development will be a fast track to addressing Connecticut’s housing deficit while also protecting more of our forests and fields from rural sprawl. As well, this is an opportunity to provide the communities in our state with important tools to support and protect the historic places that make our towns so special.

Thank you for this opportunity to write on behalf of HB 5429.

Sincerely,

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